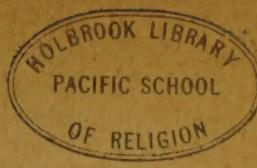


The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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DEAR MEMBER,

All three political parties have now issued memoranda on the future of education. If the second interim report of the Conservative Sub-Committee is singled out for comment, it is because the storm it has aroused has brought vital issues into debate, and at the same time shown how much those who want justice to be done to youth are at present at cross-purposes.

A PLAN FOR YOUTH

The report has had in most quarters, including many Conservative circles, a hostile reception. The immediate rally against any supposed infiltration of Fascist ideas is evidence of the strength of democratic sentiment. I leave on one side (perhaps for future discussion) the question whether in this report, and in its predecessor on "Educational Aims," too much stress is laid on the claims of the State. I am concerned here only with the educational needs of the boys and girls of the nation, and from this standpoint the debate has revealed a confusion of thought and degree of misunderstanding which a strong effort must be made to overcome. Though there have been useful contributions to the discussion, of which a letter from the Head Master of Charterhouse to *The Times* was outstanding, a great deal of the comment has been wide of the mark and left the real issues untouched.

I am not attempting here any assessment of the report as a whole. But now that a good deal of steam has been blown off, it seems worth while to ask whether there are not in the report (which some of its critics do not seem to have studied, or even to have read in full) some valuable educational ideas of which we cannot afford to lose sight as essential elements in any plan that is going to deal comprehensively and realistically with the needs of youth.

Nothing is gained by loose talk about compulsion and freedom, without defining to whom or for what purpose compulsion is, or is not, to be applied. The question has always to be reduced to the concrete, i.e. *which* liberties ought the State to restrict and *which* liberties ought it to protect.

The crucial issue for the future is that there should be secured to the whole youth of the nation the liberty of healthy growth during the critical years of adolescence. There is everything to be said in favour of such action by the State as may be needed to make impossible the state of things described in the report on *The Young Adult in South Wales*,¹ or to provide an alternative to the conditions portrayed in Miss Pearl Jephcott's vivid picture of the life of working-girls in *Girls Growing Up*.² This issue dwarfs all others, since until Parliament has decided that the educational purpose shall be dominant for all young persons up to the age of eighteen, no one can do more than tinker at the problem. Because this view has won general acceptance among educational enthusiasts, we are in

¹ University of Wales Press Board. 1s.
² Faber and Faber. 6s.

danger of under-estimating the strength of the interests and inertia that have to be overcome before the ideal is translated into fact. Controversy about details must not be allowed to obscure the important fact that the presentation to one of the great political parties of a report recommending that the whole youth of the nation up to the age of eighteen shall be brought under the care of the President of the Board of Education is a powerful reinforcement of the cause of youth.

The confusion may be traced in the main to three sources, which are closely related. In the first place, the proposals of the report are an attempt to widen and enrich the conception of education by the recognition of the educational value of activities outside the school. Professor Clarke, in an article in the *Sociological Review* (July-October, 1941), notes as three major stages in the development of English education the introduction of universal elementary education, the recognition in the Hadow Report that full-time schooling must be carried well into the adolescent years, and, thirdly, the new realization that full-time schooling alone is not enough, and continues in a passage which cannot be too seriously pondered :—

“ The strikingly new feature of this most recent phase of thinking is not the extension of control to a later age, but the contemplation of agencies of control other than the school, whether full-time or part-time. When we begin to speak, in terms of national organization, of clubs, community centres, sports, expeditions, forms of social service and active participation in industry as modes of public education which the State is prepared to subsidize, it would be well if we realized a little more clearly what we are doing. For, in effect, it is something of momentous importance, being nothing less than the reawakening, in a highly complex age, of the ideal of an Educative Society. We mean by that expression a society which has grown beyond the notion of education as a purely specialized function provided for in highly organized and sharply segregated schools and colleges, and has advanced to the conception of a society that is healthily educative in all its organs and activities.”

To think of the education of the youth of the nation in terms of day continuation schools alone, essential as these are, would be retrograde and disastrous. The only adequate view is one that embraces in a single whole the three factors of the school, education through a job, on which stress was laid in the Master of Balliol’s recent Supplement (C.N.L. No. 146), and the right use of leisure. It would be the greatest mistake to under-estimate the obstacles in the way of this broader conception of education winning through and becoming the controlling influence in national education. The conception of the Board of Education as having to do with schools is too deeply implanted in the public mind to be easily uprooted ; the extension of its activities into other fields is apt to be thought of as an intrusion. Yet a new and enlarged conception of the nature and functions of education is the most necessary and urgent educational need of our time.

A second misunderstanding of the report is the assumption that its chief emphasis is on physical training, which is then contrasted with a plan “ for the development of liberally educated citizens in a free democracy.” This is to set in disastrous opposition things that belong together. I have seen almost no reference to the fact that the term which the report uses to describe this part of its proposals is not physical training but *self-training*, and that it says explicitly with reference to the training of the body that it is “ also, and more importantly, a training of character.” A boy who knows a certain achievement to be beyond his powers, and discovers that by a process of self-discipline and application maintained over a period of months or years he has brought it within his grasp, has won a self-respect and self-confidence and capacity for dealing with the tests of life that book-learning by itself cannot provide. This extremely important educational insight has been entirely ignored in most of the criticism.

A third source of confusion arises from a lack of agreement about the relation between education and leisure. The Chairmen of the National Association of

Girls' Clubs and of the National Association of Boys' Clubs in a joint letter to *The Times*, maintained that "there are two distinct provinces in the lives of boys and girls : (1) the hours spent at school or at work, and (2) the hours of leisure or free time," and concluded that compulsion is proper in the first province and voluntary choice in the second. It is just this sharp distinction that calls for examination. To press it too hard is, on the one hand, to narrow the aims of education, restricting it to concern with only part of the life of a boy or girl instead of the whole ; and, on the other hand, to establish a distinction which relegates the activities of clubs to the recreational sphere, whereas it is precisely the results achieved by these voluntary organizations, in responding to novel situations and in recognizing new needs, that have vitalized and enriched educational thought.

The right attitude to leisure is, indeed, one of the crucial problems for the future. Guidance in the use of leisure cannot be left outside the range of conscious educational influence ; that it is not so ignored is one of the valuable features of boarding schools, where leisure is partly regulated and partly free. But it is at least of equal importance that the community should not in the name of education claim the whole field of leisure. On the question of principle the report, whatever may be thought of the effect of its particular proposals, is quite clear that boys and girls must not be left with no time to call their own or to give to family life. The tendencies towards a mass society require a determined effort to protect the privacy which is essential to the full flowering of individuality.

One final point deserves mention. It is the great merit of the report that it concentrates attention on what may be achieved *now*. It is alive to the critical opportunities presented, on the administrative side, by the registration of boys and girls and, psychologically, by the attractive power of service of the country in its hour of need. It is realistic in that it proposes to build on what already exists. What it asks is that the various agencies now concerned with youth, such as the pre-service training units, the voluntary organizations, service squads and schools, should each incorporate fresh elements in their programme, in order to work more effectively along their own distinctive lines towards a common end, in accordance with a plan approved by the Board of Education ; and that the Government should take power to control a specified part of both the employed and the unemployed time of boys and girls, and provide, so far as is necessary, the personnel required for training, even if this means the release of men from the fighting services.

HOURS OF WORK

The difficulty which a programme of this kind has to meet in war-time is that it may conflict with the immediate demands of the war. The difficulty does not arise, of course, in the case of boys and girls already belonging to a pre-service unit or voluntary organization, though even in these the danger of over-strain needs watching in individual cases. But the question of hours of work is inseparably bound up with educational policy.

By the Factories Act of 1937 the legal hours of work for young persons under 16 were restricted to 44 per week, and for those between 16 and 18 to 48 hours, with overtime not exceeding 6 hours a week, and 100 hours in the year. Under emergency war legislation the hours in certain works have been increased by Order of the Minister, but in no case (with one or two temporary exceptions for a few weeks) beyond 48 hours for those under 16. Girls between 16 and 18 can be allowed to work by Order up to 60 hours, but subject in each case to permission in writing by the District Inspector of Factories. One of our members, who is intimately acquainted with conditions in industry, says in a letter :—

"In considering these hours we must make up our mind as to whether we are to consider these girls as machines for the winning of the war or as citizens of the next generation. If the former, then I do not think forty-eight hours for those under sixteen and, say fifty-four for those over will, of themselves, hurt their health. But when we have got this out of our girls, we must not ask for anything more—clubs, education, training are all out of the question. They must go to bed.

"If we are to consider them as citizens, then these hours are too long. A fifty-four-hour week means being present at the factory for about eleven hours a day for five days and for Saturday morning. If the girl lives within walking distance of the factory, some recreation or club at night may be possible; but in London and many parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire to-day there has to be added to the working day at the factory at least one hour's travelling at each end of the day's work, and then there is no time for anything except bed.

"This problem of citizenship is closely tied up with our education, and if we are to do the next generation justice, the hours should be shortened if that generation is to have a chance of recreation and study. After the war we shall certainly raise the school age and probably establish some system of part-time training in the first years of industrial life. This will mean that the actual hours of work will have to be reduced very much below even the forty-four and the forty-eight in use at present. Meanwhile, the great problem is how far can we go towards this during the war period at the expense of losing the very valuable war work of these youngsters. I know this question is the deep concern of many who are now carrying this responsibility."

A question into which careful inquiry is needed is how leisure is at present used by those who are not members of a voluntary organization. It must not be assumed that it is in all cases spent unprofitably. There is not enough information to generalize, but it is significant that the response to the invitation at their interviews to join some voluntary organization or pre-service training unit has been greater from boys than from girls; there are now nearly twice as many boys as girls connected with voluntary organizations or enrolled in pre-service training units. One country youth organizer sent out 600 letters to those who at the interview undertook to join some organization but failed to do so. The majority of the letters were to girls, and the responses were various. Some pleaded long hours at work, but far more said that they were too busy at home. In dealing with the problem of youth we can never afford to lose sight of the fact that the home is the first and the greatest training centre, and the part that it plays in training older girls in domestic craft and in the care of smaller children can never be excelled by any outside organization.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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